IN THE DRAWINGS:

Applicants respectfully traverse informalities in the drawings. They have been corrected by amendments in the specification.

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

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In general, access router 30 routes data communicated between user systems 14 and core network 16. For example, access router 30 may be an ATM router. Although exemplary access network 18 includes only one access router 30, access network 18 may include multiple access routers 30 coupled in any appropriate manner without departing from the scope of the present invention. Data may be communicated between access router 30 and user systems 14 using DSLAM 28, which may aggregate data traffic received from user systems 14 and forward the traffic to access router 30 over a single ATM link. Accordingly, data may be communicated between DSLAM 28 and access router 30 using IP over ATM. Access router 30 may also aggregate data traffic received from multiple user systems 14 or from multiple DSLAMs 28. Access router 30 may include central processing unit (CPU) 36, memory 38, and join request manager 40. CPU 26 may perform calculations and other appropriate tasks associated with routing or switching data units. Memory 28 38 may contain software and other information for directing the operations of access router 20 30, provide a buffer for incoming and outgoing data signals, and be used for other suitable memory-related tasks. User device 20 may access a multicast traffic flow provided by content provider 12 by submitting an IGMP join request to access router 30, requesting to join the multicast group corresponding to the traffic flow. IGMP join requests submitted by user devices 20 are handled within access router 30 by join request manager 40.

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Join request manager 40 receives IGMP join requests submitted to access router 30 by user devices 20 and grants or denies the received requests according to a suitable criterion or criteria. Join request manager 40 may be logically or physically integral to or separate from access router 30 or other logical or physical components

of access ~~router~~ <u>network</u> 18. Join request manager 40 may deny IGMP join requests in a suitable manner. In one embodiment, for example, join request manager 40 denies join requests by simply dropping the packets containing the join requests. Join request manager 40 may also grant IGMP join requests in any suitable manner. In one embodiment, join request manager 40 grants join requests by communicating the join requests to one or more other devices for further processing, such as verifying whether user system 14, user device ~~2~~ <u>20</u> or the user has access privileges needed to access the requested multicast traffic flow. Join request manager 40 may be implemented in software, hardware, or a combination of software and hardware.